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Remarks upon Christian Discipline
and Church Government . 1827

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FROM

Henry Joel Cadbury



REMARKS
UPON
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE
AND
CHURCH GOVERNMENT,
EXTRACTED PRINCIPALLY
FROM THE WRITINGS
OF SOME OF THE
MOST EMINENT EARLY MEMBERS
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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THE FOLLOWING SELECTIONS clearly exhibit the fundamental principle upon which the Christian discipline of the religious Society of Friends was originally established, viz. *the wisdom and the power of God*; and cannot but be interesting to all who are desirous that good order and a sound discipline should be preserved amongst us. When we consider the importance of its proper support, and the propensity of our nature to slide even from what we have been convinced is right, occasional mementos of this sort may be of use.

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Pertinent advice and caution from the writings of Stephen Crisp, John Griffith, and John Churchman.

REMARKS

UPON

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE, &c.

A definition of the true Church, and from whence its power is derived.

Isaac Pennington says, The Church is a body : every particular soul, that is *renewed, quickened and kept alive*, is a member : Now every member needs the presence and power of that spirit which quickened it, to nourish, keep alive, and order it. And the Church hath much more need of the Spirit to be present with it, to guide and order it, and to keep it in the *holy order, power, and government of life*. And this order and holy government, *in the spirit and power of the Lord*, was brought forth in the apostles' days.

God gives power to his Church to perform all that he requires of her as a church. Now the Church is a spiritual body, and is to take care of her members, to look after them that they mind the truth, and to admonish and reprove them when they do otherwise. And every member of the Church ought to hear the Church in whatever she speaks unto it from God. Every member hath need of the light, and spirit, and power, which God gives his Church, and reveals in his Church for the good of the body, and the benefit and advantage of each member therein.

It is the holy will and pleasure of the great God, that *his Church should be governed by his holy Spirit and power revealed in it*. God is the God of order and not of confusion ; and he would have every thing in the *right and holy order* every where, especially *in his Church*. He hath given a measure of his good Spirit to every man, and he would have every man governed thereby ; and he hath given *more of his good Spirit and holy power* to his Church than to any particular ; and he would have his Church governed thereby. Read the epistles of Christ to the Churches in the 2d and 3d chapters of the Revelations, and see how govern-

ment and care over their members is expected from them. A Church is a gathering in the name, power and authority of the Most High, and Christ, to whom God gave all power in heaven and earth, is in them and with them. God knows they can do nothing without his power, and he is faithful who hath appointed them to meet together in his name, and he will not fail them.

When Meetings for Discipline and good order were first established amongst Friends: their nature and design.

In 1653, George Fox gave a paper of advice to Friends, how to proceed orderly in accomplishing their marriages.

In 1660, he says he went "to Skipton where was a general meeting of men Friends out of many counties, concerning the affairs of the Church." "To this meeting came many Friends out of most parts of the nation, for it was about business relating to the Church, both in this nation and beyond the sea. Several years before, when I was in the north, I was moved to recommend to Friends the setting up of this meeting," &c.

In 1666, he says, "I was moved of the Lord to recommend the setting up of five Monthly Meetings of men and women, in the city of London, besides the women's Meetings and the Quarterly Meetings, to take care of God's glory, and to admonish and exhort such as walk disorderly or carelessly, and not according to truth. For whereas Friends had only Quarterly Meetings, now truth was spread and Friends grown more numerous, I was moved to recommend the setting up of Monthly Meetings throughout the nation.

And the Lord opened to me what I must do, and how the men's and women's Monthly and Quarterly Meetings should be ordered and established in this and other nations, and that I should write to those where I came not, to do the same. After things were well settled at London, and the Lord's truth, power, seed and life reigned and shined over all in the city, I went into Essex." After mentioning the settlement of these meetings in various places, he says, "We came into Cheshire, where we had several blessed meetings, and

a general men's Meeting, wherein all the Monthly Meetings for that county were settled according to the Gospel order, in and by the power of God."

In order to encourage and strengthen Friends, at a time when some whom the enemy had drawn into division and separation were making great opposition to the discipline, and meetings for transacting Church affairs, he wrote an epistle from which the following is an extract, viz.—

My dear Friends in the Lord Jesus Christ,

All you that are gathered in his holy name, know that your meetings for worship, your Quarterly Meetings, Monthly Meetings, women's Meetings and Yearly Meetings, are set up by the power and Spirit of the Lord God, and witnessed by his Spirit and power in your hearts: and by the Spirit and power of the Lord God they are established to you, and in the power and Spirit of the Lord God you are established in them. The Lord God hath with his spirit sealed to you that your meetings are of his ordering and gathering, and he hath owned them by honouring you with his blessed presence in them, and you have had experience of his furnishing you with wisdom, life and power, and heavenly riches from his treasure and fountain, by which many thanks and praises have been returned in your meetings to his holy, glorious name.

In the ancient testimony of the people called Quakers, printed by direction of the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, 1722, they say, "We think well at this time for the further information and encouragement of our youth and others, whose faces are turned towards Zion, to signify, that by living experience we find, and can with good conscience declare and testify, that the same blessed, holy Spirit, which led us to believe and receive the doctrines and principles of truth as they were declared by Christ and his apostles in the holy scriptures, did, and now doth, lead us into the like holy order and government, to be exercised among us, as it was amongst the primitive Christians, in sanctification and holiness.

For the Church of God is a gathering of those that are sanctified by the word of truth, called to be saints, who are members of the body, even the true Church whereof

Jesus Christ is the Head. But, before any can come to be true members of that body, they must witness the fiery baptism of the Holy Ghost, to initiate them into this true Church."

In the book of Christian advices, published by the Yearly Meeting held in Philadelphia, they say :

"The more we experience a preparation of heart for the exercise of our respective gifts, the more amply shall we evince the expression of the tongue to be seasoned with that living virtue and divine power, which proceeds from our Holy Head, and thus, in conducting the important concerns of society, we shall be enabled to example the beloved youth in a manner which will evidence to them that neither tradition nor mere outward education can fitly prepare them for successors in the Church. Upon this subject we are the more solicitous, as we believe many who were evidently under the forming hand, have been suddenly laid hold of, and introduced into service, before that preparation of heart hath been sufficiently experienced, which leads to a reliance upon divine direction, and redeems from a confidence in the natural understanding : on the other hand, we believe, there has in many places been a want of care in those who are acceptably active in the discipline, rightly to distinguish, and seasonably to bring into action, the talents bestowed upon some in the early stage of life ; it being truly desirable, that by a just discrimination of times and seasons, and of the qualifications bestowed, every gift may be rightly exercised, and a succession of useful members preserved in every rank in the Church."

"Let an enquiry be raised in the minds of all the members of the Church, who have had any part of the Lord's work upon them, how they have acquitted themselves in his sight, forasmuch as a day comes on apace, in which an account of our stewardship will be required at our hands.

"If this awful sense of rendering an account of our trust, and the importance of being clear from the blood of each other, were enough impressed upon all minds, the right exercise of our Christian discipline would be a means of our edification in righteousness, and preservation from many evils of the world.

"We are concerned that the management of our Christian discipline be not committed to hands unclean, particularly of such who allow, or connive at, undue liberties in their own children or families. If a man, said the apostle, know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God."

The way of the enemy's working in order to rend and divide and draw from the truth, and into a disbelief of it, and a libertine and disorderly conduct—And the views of the primitive Christians, and of Friends, on the power of the Church to disunite from membership with it, such as walk disorderly.

William Penn says, "From the deep sense that I have of the working of the enemy of Zion's peace, to rend and divide the heritage of God, who under the pretence of crying down man, forms and prescriptions, is crying down the heavenly Man Christ Jesus, his blessed order and government, which he hath brought forth by his own revelation and power through his faithful witnesses : this I further testify, first, that the enemy by these fair pretences strikes at the godly care and travail that dwells upon the spirits of many faithful brethren, that all things might be preserved sweet, virtuous, comely and of good report in the Church of God," &c. He further adds, "I warn all that they take heed of a slighting and obstinate mind, and that they have a care how they give way to the outcry of some, falsely entitled, Liberty of conscience against imposition, &c.

Robert Barclay, in his excellent treatise on Church government, makes the following observations, viz.

"Now the ground of all schisms, divisions or rents in the body is, when as any member assumes another place than is allotted it ; or being gone from the life and unity of the body, and losing the sense of it, lets in the murmurer, the eye that watches for evil, and not in holy care over its fellow members ; and then, instead of coming down to judgment in itself, will stand up, and judge its fellow members ; yea, the whole body, or those whom God has set in a more honourable and eminent place in the body than

itself. Such suffer not the word of exhortation ; and term the reproofs of instruction, which is the way of life, imposition and oppression, and are not aware how far they are in the things they condemn others for ; while they spare not to reprove and revile all their fellow members ; yet if they be but admonished themselves, they cry out as if their great charter of gospel liberty were broken.

“ And some not abiding in subjection to the truth in themselves, were not contented with that place and station in the body, which God had placed them in ; but became vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds, intruding into those things which they had not seen ; and would needs be innovators, given to change, and introducing new doctrines and practices, not only differing, but contrary to what was already delivered in the beginning ; making parties, causing divisions and rents, stumbling the weak, and denying, despising and reviling the apostles and messengers of Christ, the elders of the church, who loved not their lives unto death, but through much care, and travel, and watchings, and whippings and bonds, and beatings, in daily jeopardy, gathered us by the mighty power of God into the most precious truth.”

“ Such, who being departed from their first love and ancient zeal for the truth, become cold and lukewarm ; and yet are ashamed to make open apostacy, and to turn back again, so as to deny all the principles of truth, they having had already such evidence of clearness upon their understanding ; yet not keeping low in their own habitations, but being puffed up, and giving way to the restless imaginations of their exalted and wandering minds, fall out with their brethren ; cause divisions ; begin to find fault with every thing, and to look at others more than at themselves ; with swelling words to talk of, and preach up a higher dispensation, while they are far from living up to the life and perfection of this present ; like unto such who said, we will not have this man to rule over us : cry out of formality and apostacy, because they are not followed in all things ; and if they be reproved for their unruliness, according to the good order of the Church of Christ, then they cry out, *Breach of liberty, oppression, persecution ; we will have*

none of your order and government; we are taught to follow the light in our consciences, and not the orders of men.

“Now I say, we being gathered together into the belief of certain principles and doctrines, without any constraint or worldly respect, but by the mere force of truth upon our understanding, and its power and influence upon our hearts; these principles and doctrines, and the practices necessarily depending upon them are, as it were, the *terms* that have drawn us together, and the *bond** by which we became centred into one body and fellowship, and distinguished from others. Now if any one, or more, so engaged with us, should arise to teach any other doctrine or doctrines, contrary to these which were the ground of our being one; who can deny, but the body hath power in such a case to declare, This is not according to the truth we profess; and therefore we pronounce such and such doctrines to be wrong, with which we cannot have unity, nor yet any more spiritual fellowship with those that hold them? And so such cut themselves off from being members, by dissolving the very bond by which they were linked to the body. Now this cannot be accounted *tyranny and oppression*, no more than in a civil society, if one of the society shall contradict one or more of the fundamental articles, upon which the society was contracted, it cannot be reckoned a breach or iniquity in the whole society to declare, that such contradictors have done wrong, and forfeited their right in that society; in case, by the original constitution, the nature of the contradiction implies such a forfeiture, as usually it is; and will no doubt hold in religious matters. As if a body be gathered into one fellowship, by the belief of certain principles, he that comes to believe otherwise, naturally scattereth himself; for that the cause, that gathered him, is taken away: and so those that abide

* Yet this is not so the bond, but that we have also a more inward and invisible, to wit, the life of righteousness, whereby we also have unity with the upright seed in all, even in those, whose understandings are not yet so enlightened. But to those who are once enlightened, this is an outward bond; and if they suffer themselves to be darkened through disobedience, which as it does in the outward bond, so it doth in the inward.

constant in declaring the thing to be so as it is, and in looking upon him, and witnessing of him to others (if need be) to be such, as he has made himself, do him no injury. I shall make the supposition in general, and let every people make the application to themselves, abstracting from us; and then let conscience and reason in every impartial reader declare, whether or not it doth hold? Suppose people really gathered unto the belief of the true and certain principles of the gospel, if any of these people shall arise and contradict any of those fundamental truths, whether have not such as stand, good right to cast such an one out from among them, and to pronounce, positively, this is contrary to the truth we profess and own; and therefore ought to be rejected, and not received, nor yet he that asserts it as one of us? And is not this obligatory upon all the members, seeing all are concerned in the like care as to themselves, to hold the right and shut out the wrong? I cannot tell, if any man of reason can well deny this: however, I shall prove it next from the testimony of the scripture."

Gal. 1. 8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed 1 Tim. 1. 19, 20. Holding faith and a good conscience which some having put away, concerning faith, have made shipwreck. Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2 John 10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him rejoice.

"These Scriptures are so clear and plain in themselves as to this purpose, that they need no great exposition to the unbiassed and unprejudicate reader. For seeing it is so that in the true church there may men arise, and speak perverse things, *contrary to the doctrine and gospel* ALREADY RECEIVED; what is to be the place of those that hold the pure and ancient truth? must they look upon these pervers men still as their brethren? must they cherish them as fellow

members, or must they judge, condemn and deny them? We must not think the apostle wanted charity, who will have them accursed; and that gave Hymenæus and Alexander over to Satan, after that they had departed from the true faith, that they might learn not to blaspheme. In short, if we must (as our opposers herein acknowledge) preserve and keep those that are come to own the truth, by the same means they were gathered and brought into it, we must not cease to be plain with them, and tell them, when they are wrong; and by sound doctrine both exhort and convince gainsayers. If the apostles of Christ of old, and the preachers of the everlasting gospel in this day, had told the people, however wrong they found them in their faith and principles, "our charity and love is such, we dare not judge you, nor separate from you; but let us all live in love together, and every one enjoy his own opinion, and all will be well:" how should the nations have been; or what way now can they be brought to truth and righteousness? Would not the devil love this doctrine well, by which, darkness and ignorance, error and confusion might still continue in the earth unreprieved and uncondemned; if it was needful then for the apostles of Christ in the days of old to reprove, without sparing to tell the high priests and great professors among the Jews, that they were stubborn and stiff-necked, and always resisted the Holy Ghost, without being guilty of imposition and oppression, or want of true love and charity; and also for those messengers the Lord raised up in this day, to reprove and cry out against the hireling priests, and to tell the world openly, both professors and profane, that they were in darkness and ignorance, out of the truth, strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; if God has gathered a people, by this means, into the belief of one and the same truth, must not they, if they turn and depart from it, be admonished, reprov'd and condemned (yea, rather than those that are not yet come to the truth,) because they crucify afresh unto themselves the Lord of glory, and put him to open shame? It seems the apostle judged it very needful they should be so dealt with, Tit. 1. 10. when he says, "There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of

the circumcision, *whose mouths must be stopped*, &c. Were such a principle to be received and believed, that in the Church of Christ no man should be separated from, no man condemned or excluded the fellowship and communion of the body, for his judgment or opinion in matters of faith, then what blasphemies so horrid, what heresies so damnable, what doctrines of devils, but might harbour itself in the Church of Christ? What need then of sound doctrine, if no doctrine make unsound? What need of convincing and exhorting gainsayers, if to gainsay be no crime? Where should the unity of the faith be? Were not this an inlet to all manner of abomination; and to make void the whole tendency of Christ's and his apostles' doctrine; and render the gospel of none effect; and give a liberty to the unconstant and giddy will of man to innovate, alter and overturn it at his pleasure? So that from all that is above mentioned, we do safely conclude, that where a people are gathered together into the belief of the principles and doctrines of the gospel of Christ, if any of that people shall go from their principles, and assert things false and contrary to what they have already received; such as stand and abide firm in the faith, have power, by the Spirit of God, after they have used Christian endeavours to convince and reclaim them, upon their obstinacy, to separate from such, and to exclude them from their spiritual fellowship and communion: For otherwise, if this be denied, farewell to all Christianity, or to the maintaining of *any* sound doctrine in the Church of Christ."

Isaac Pennington, after setting forth the authority of the Church, as given by our blessed Saviour, Matthew 18. 17. queries—

"Is not this power and authority necessary to the true Church? What? a Church, and not have power over her own members, but every one left to the dictates of what they call the light within, and not be subject to the judgment, the true light, spirit and power of Christ, the Head in the living body? What a Church were this? A mere Babel, an heap of confusion; a body that would never be at unity in itself. But God is the God of the order of his own Spirit, life and power, and not of such confusion. This

doctrine may go for truth in Babylon, but can never be owned in God's Jerusalem, where his Spirit did build up and defends the buildings, and judgeth out all such sandy and windy doctrines, which are loose and airy, and have not a ground or bottom in the truth."

In the London Yearly Meeting Book of Extracts we find the following observations:—

"When any by their inconsistent and disorderly conduct, or by imbibing and adopting principles and practices contrary to the doctrine which we have received, have first openly manifested their disunity with the Society, it is but just and requisite that, after endeavouring, and waiting to restore them without effect, the body should testify its disunity with such erring and refractory members; at the same time earnestly desiring that they may be convinced of the error of their ways, and that through unfeigned repentance, and a consistent, orderly conduct in future, they may be reunited to the body. This being the utmost extent of our discipline respecting offenders, it is very evident that from the right exercise thereof, no degree of persecution or imposition can be justly inferred; for the imposition rests entirely on the part of those who insist on being retained as members, whilst at open variance with the body, either in principle or practice."

Pertinent advice and caution from the writings of STEPHEN CRISP, JOHN GRIFFITH, and JOHN CHURCHMAN.

Stephen Crisp makes these remarks, viz.—

"Oh dear Friends, consider these days are perilous times, and it is needful for every one to watch in that same eternal light to which you were first turned, that by its righteous judgment you may be preserved from every thing in yourselves that appears contrary to that precious life, of which you have tasted. And when you have so done, then take heed that the enemy do not do that by an instrument, which, through your watchfulness in the light, he could not do without. And all beware of that *affected tenderness*, that

cries out, be tender to all, and pray for all, and mind the good in all, and love all, and judge none, but leave judgment to God. I say, heed not the plausible words of that spirit, which, being guilty, to save its own head from a stroke, would bereave you of your judgment which God hath given you; and is indeed truly his judgment, and is to be administered in his wisdom and power, for the cleansing and keeping clean his sanctuary: for such as have no judgment in their goings, are they that know not the true way of peace, but make them crooked paths. He that goeth in them shall not know peace.

But some may say, was not Christ meek and lowly? and ought not all to be like unto him? It is true, my friends; but there is a difference between the seed's suffering and its reigning, and there are times for them both; and when it doth please God to permit the hour and power of darkness in the open persecutors, to exalt itself against his seed and people, by persecution or such like; they are led by his Spirit to appear in meekness and quietness, as sheep before the shearer. But what is this to suffering bad and perverse spirits, that appear under pretence of the truth, and yet are out of the truth, and enemies to its prosperity, striving to exalt and set up another thing instead of the truth? Such as these the Lord doth not require you to use only patience and meekness towards, but, if that will not reclaim them, they must know the judgment of the truth, and you in it must stand over them: for, in this case, the day of the exaltation of Christ is come, and God is crowning Truth with dominion over every false spirit and corrupt practice thereof.

And therefore, dear friends, eye the Lord in his goings forth, and as you feel his life in you to witness against any evil and corrupt thing or practice, use plainness and keep sincerity, and turn not judgment backward; for that which is unwilling to be judged, and cries out, *judge none, leave all to God*, &c. the same will take upon it both to judge and rule, but not in the wisdom of God. And those that cry out so much for tenderness and against Truth's judgment, the same are in most danger to be drawn out from the patient suffering in the spirit of Christ Jesus, when they ought to appear in the most meekness; and to appear rough

and wrathful in the striving and fighting nature, and are most apt to be tempted into a spirit of revenge, as hath been seen by sad experience: for they that lose the exercise of that by which all should keep dominion over deceit, they lose that strength by which they should be enabled to suffer all things for the sake of Christ Jesus."

John Griffith says, "It is of the utmost consequence, that the members who constitute the Church of Christ be thoroughly acquainted with the true spring of motion and action therein, lest any should presumptuously conceive or imagine, that seeing Church government carries much the appearance of outward œconomy and civil proceedings; human abilities, natural and acquired, are sufficient to manage the same. If any man fall into such a dangerous error, it must be for want of duly considering the nature of the work to be engaged in; it being no other than what appertains to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and the promotion thereof on earth; which kingdom, man by nature cannot see nor understand. And it is written, "the world by wisdom knew not God," therefore they cannot know his kingdom, nor how to act properly therein, under the supreme Head, whom they know not."

"It may be further observed, that those whose principal view is only maintaining the form or outward character in religion, feel very little or no pain on account of the disorderly practices of their fellow members, and therefore they can easily daub with untempered mortar, and smooth all over, crying peace, before judgment has laid hold of the transgressing part; and all this done under the specious pretence of charity and Christian tenderness. Yet when any in godly zeal are constrained to shew the pernicious consequence of healing the wounds of the daughter of Sion deceitfully, some such soon discover they are too much strangers to true charity, by their opposition to sound judgment, and those exercised therein, that the wounds might be searched to the bottom. Here something of a persecuting spirit appears, and the bitter leaven of the Pharisee is discovered, striking at the life of religion. But, agreeable to the usual craft of antichrist, they must call a godly concern and labour by a contrary name, or they could not

smite at it with any colour of reason. Such honest labourers have sometimes been represented as enthusiasts, too hot in their zeal, disturbers of the Church's peace, &c. When there is a peace in the Church with wrong things, it is much better broke than kept. I take it, that it was in this sense our Lord said, "I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword." It was a woeful peace to Israel, when they became so reconciled to the inhabitants of the land, as to suffer them to dwell therein, contrary to the express command of God !"

On conducting the religious concerns of Meetings for Discipline. From J. CHURCHMAN'S Journal.

"All who attend those meetings should inwardly wait, in great awfulness, to know the immediate presence of Christ, the head of the Church, to give them an understanding, what their several services are, and for ability to answer the requirings of truth; for it is by the light and spirit thereof, that the Lord's work is done with acceptance. And none should presume to speak or act without its motion or direction: for they who act and speak without it, do often darken counsel, mislead the weak, and expose their own folly, to the burthen and grief of sensible Friends.

It was in great fear that I attempted to speak in these meetings; and as I kept low, with a single eye to the honour of truth, I felt peace and inward strength to increase from time to time: and it is good for all who are concerned to speak to matters in meetings for discipline, in the first place, to take heed that their own spirits do not prompt thereto, and to mind the time when to speak fitly; for a word in season from a pure heart is precious, and frequently prevents debates, instead of ministering contention. And when they have spoken to business, they should turn inward to feel whether the pure truth owns them; and in that rest, without an over anxious care whether it succeeds at that time or not: so Friends will be preserved from being lifted up, because their service is immediately owned; or if it should be rejected or slighted, in this inward humble state, the labour is felt and seen to be the Lord's."



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